

**How minority LGBTQ Greek Students construct identity in
their collegiate life and negotiate their intersectionalities in
relation to membership of various ethnic communities and
Greek societies**

A Senior Research Thesis

**Presented with distinction in African and African American Studies
Department**

By

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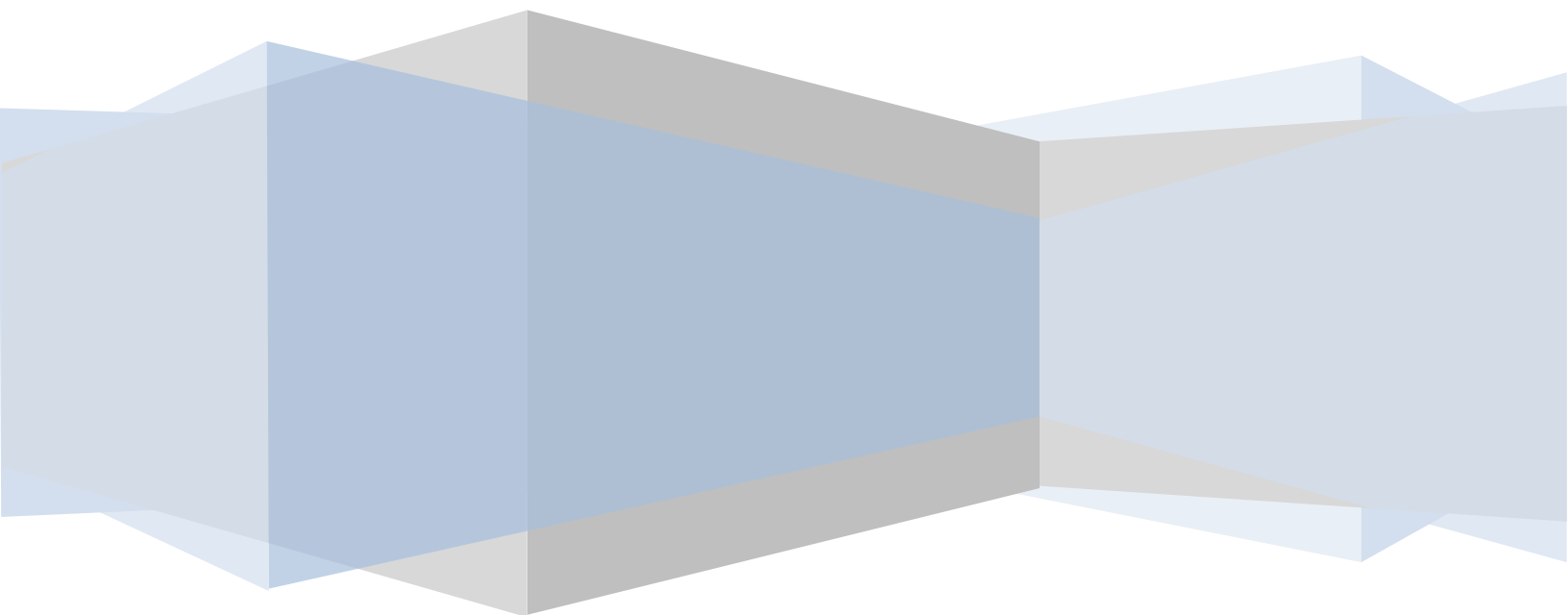


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Abstract

This thesis research seeks to examine the intersections of race, gender, class, and sexuality in relation to the experience of minority LGBTQ sorority women and fraternity men in Greek-letter organizations within the Sorority and Fraternity Life system. This research will explore race, class, gender, and sexuality as categories that organize culture and society; but also as sources of individual and collective identity and action. The research aims to contribute new knowledge about the experiences and opinions of minority LGBTQ Greek students, in order to support their equal and full participation in Greek student organizations and campus life. Therefore, this is to be a qualitative research project that though an undergraduate autoethnography, will be of a high standard and a usable resource not only for the minority LGBTQ Greek students themselves but also for the Sorority and Fraternal community as a whole. The hope is that it will also be a catalyst for further research in a currently under-researched field of study.

Dedication

Adrienne Mclean

Closer than a sister & more than a best friend

~

Lea Madry

Believed in me when I could not come up with a reason to, my best friend, mentor, and further
still my sister, not by blood but by fate

~

Yolonde and Nolita Berger

Mothers who have provided me guidance and love when I needed it most

~

Tina Love

Helped me get to where I am and always made sure I went to class even in the rain and snow

~

Sharrell Hassell-Goodman

Is always pushing me to make my good better, and my better best

~

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Introduction

Fraternities and sororities are often referred to by the encompassing term 'Greek letter organizations' and also described by the overwhelming adjective 'Greek'; phrases such as 'Greek community', 'Greek system', 'Greek life', or members as 'Greeks' and 'fraternities and sororities.' More formally, Greek students can be referred to as 'sorority women' and 'fraternity men' and the society they reside in 'sorority and fraternity life'. While there are several different kinds of Greek-letter-organizations, for the purpose of this thesis research, these terms will be used to refer to national Greek letter organizations, which are social and require a life pledge from their undergraduate student members. In addition, this study will focus primarily on minority LGBTQ students and minority LGBTQ Greek organizations where there are LGBTQ minority student members. The minority status being referred to is made up of these general ethnic communities within the U.S.-Asian, African, Native American, and Hispanic or Latino—American as well as those who are of Asian, African, or Latin American Descent. LGBTQ membership largely within historically white sororities and fraternities has and is being discussed more. Unfortunately however acknowledgment of LGBTQ within the ethnic Greek communities has and seemly remains a huge culture shock. Walter Kimbrough speaks about specifically the high levels of homophobia in the Black community and this being further emphasized in the Black Greek community in his book, *Black Greek 101*. "Generally stated, Blacks do not endorse homosexuals and homosexuality as a legitimate lifestyle. Many will admit that Black America is one of, if not the most homophobic group in the country." Kimbrough further states that this homophobia is deeply rooted in religion and although he specific points out the African American community it is also deduced that other ethnic communities also

struggle with LGBTQ individuals. Hence minority LGBTQ Greek students are an overwhelming minority group-sometimes a minority within a minority-within the Greek Life system; “invisible minorities” according to Kimbrough. Little to no research at all has been done in order to inquire about the existence of these individuals.

All sorority and fraternal organizations are founded on specific social principles regarding sisterhood or brotherhood. In addition to other pillars or values that each organization has, they also strive to better their members so that they may rise in mainstream society. The very terms *frater* and *soror* are Latin for ‘brother’ and ‘sister’. Most Greek letter organizations were originally organized on just one campus. Then after that first authorized chapter, called a local chapter, has been established many Greek letter organizations will expand into new campuses. This is then followed by the creation of a national organization to govern the local chapters as an in whole. At this stage, the newly formed Greek letter organization is then considered a ‘national’ organization even if it only has two chapters (Torbenson, 2005).

Sororities and fraternities were established to address the social aspect of collegiate life, in contrast to other student organizations that existed at the time, like literary societies and debate clubs. These latter organizations had been the most popular form of student social organizations when the American university system first started out, providing a space that created further intellectual stimulation for students as well as writing and speaking skill development. These organizations had very distinguished membership rites of passage, mottoes, and badges. The early sororities and fraternities combined these traditions with the new and unique use of Greek-letters to represent their organizations. In addition, Greek

organizations also developed initiation rituals and Masonic philosophy. Greek organizations also set out goals and missions for their members which usually included high standards of scholarship and moral conduct, perpetuating brother/sisterhood, development of leadership and inter-personal skills, and striving for excellence as an individual (Torbenson, 2005). Many of the morals or the moral codes within the Greek system are based on religious and or biblical principles. And the reason for these religious principles goes back to Masonic philosophy in which founded in theocratic faith. Even still Masonic does not limit its concept of Divinity or how one goes about achieving it (Newton, 1914). Similarly which religion or moral code a Greek member follows varies and depends on the chapter and council to which that organization belongs. Thus it can be concluded that within the Greek system an expectation of a belief in a god is there while which god an individual Greek member chooses is mostly up them. Moreover, even if some rituals seem to be under a single religion most organizations do not or would not claim a single religion so they would not offend anyone or turn away perspective members because their personal religious identity may be different. Again the very least it would be safe to say that many (not all) Greek organizations have expectation of a belief in a god, meaning they have or foster believe in a religion or spirituality but do not regulate the freedom of individual members and or their community to practice whatever religion they want. Additionally, the concept of brother/sisterhood is fundamental aspect of Greek Life that sets it apart from other organizations on a college campus. Brother/sisterhood has to do with one's relationship with their line or class members, all the members in their chapter that came before them, and to the organization itself. In Greek society, an individual is choosing to become a part of their organization then working hard to complete the requirements necessary

to be initiated. The bond formed over and during the process to get into the organization combined with love for the organization that is also shared by other sisters amongst other things all cultivate what is brother/sisterhood. Brother/sisterhood cannot be completely defined as the encounter with individuals and the love you have with and for them is not something one can physically touch or see but something a person has to experience and feel.

Sororities and fraternities brought new meaning to leisure time associated with collegiate life. Greek societies and organizations functioned to provide a combined experience that went beyond other and ordinary university organizations for students. Within sorority and fraternities, individuals were able to find brother/sisterhood, gain a new support and networking system, develop leadership and professional skills, as well as participate in philanthropic activities-all of which successfully distinguished sorority and fraternity members from other students. Going forward, it is important to acknowledge that the first fraternal organizations that were established were strictly white, Protestant, and male organizations supposedly holding higher moral standard. However, eventually after nearly a hundred of years from the founding of the first fraternity, membership was extended to women and sororities were finally established, the first being Kappa Alpha Theta in 1870. Since that time, North America has accrued several large national Greek organizations with hundreds of chapters, with several now being international with chapters all over the world (Torbenson, 2005).

Gender is largely socially constructed and is heavily influenced by several aspects of culture and society (Weedon, 2004). Food, clothing, religion, values, norms, gender constructions, government, and environment are just a few influencing aspects of culture. And culture could be very simply defined as a particular way of life that goes back to the way an

individual was raised, went to school, and was taught how to live. An individual's personal identification with and understanding of dominate gender roles and norms that exist in their culture and society directly influences the construction of that individual's perception of self. This idea of what an individual thinks of and values their self is greatly impacted and related back to that individual's culture. Furthermore what a dominate culture constructs and depicts as male or female and defines as masculine and feminine influences how subcultures or various minority/ethnic cultures or subcultures and communities other than the mainstream will express their own alternative or oppositional constructions of gender and gender relations. Subcultures can also be simply defined as groups of individuals within a culture that forms out of resistance to the dominate culture and all the values, norms, and customs the dominant culture creates. In America, many aspects of the dominant heterosexual, Judo-Christian and patriarchal norms that define what it means to be a man or a woman often become even more strictly enforced within many the minority/ethnic populations (Glenn, 2002), for a range of reasons which this research will discuss. In particular, beliefs and values relating to sexual orientations that differ from what is seen as the mainstream societal or community norm are often rejected as deviant by minority cultures also. As mentioned earlier, Greek-letter organizations, especially Black Greek Letter Organizations (BGLOs) and Multicultural Greek Letter Organizations (MGLOs), are greatly influenced by the culture of the communities that surround and established them. As a result such organizations acted as microcosm from their inception and continue to do so today. In very recent years, great efforts have been made by LGBTQ Greek members, advisors, Sorority and Fraternity Greek Life directors and others to challenge and overcome the homophobia within the Greek system. As a result, the Greek

community has and still is experiencing huge changes in this respect. various individuals are stepping up and doing the best they can to tackle hundreds of years of Greek history and tradition in order to make room for new rituals and to create a safe space for those LGBTQ Greek members who until more currently years have had to hid aspects of their identity. Nevertheless a close friend shared an experience with me where in her years at an undergrad at Duke University she was approached by her National organization in regards to her sexual orientation. My close friend had come into her organization already out however she began to date her now girlfriend who was in the closet and her sister within their organization. Somehow this information got out and around campus and then back to her National organization. Once her National headquarters found out about the two sisters dating they sent a representative to come down and speak with her about the situation. After standing firm on her lesbian identity and convincing the representative she was gay and that was watch the situation was the representative moved to ask her to at the very least change her appearance so that she would be more feminine. I was outraged for my friend and even after much research of national websites and so forth I could find only a very small amount of national organizations (primarily gay/lesbian Greek organization or multicultural Greek sororities and fraternities that were all inclusive). Otherwise I found that at the national level of these organizations, there are discriminatory attitudes and behaviors that could be interpreted as very homophobia. Discrimination on the bases of sexual orientation is also another topic of discussion throughout all Greek-letter councils not just ethnic minority Greek organizations. Thus, the experience of minority LGBTQ Greek students must be examined in order to investigate the existence or extent of homophobia in order to discover what support, understanding, and other initiatives

that need to be provided in Greek Life for these members. Further to evaluate the level of homophobic discrimination that might still exist within current Greek Life systems.

Brief History of the Greek Letter System and Culture

Phi Beta Kappa, established in the year 1776, is recognized as the first fraternity and Greek-letter-organization. Sigma Phi, which was founded in 1827 is attributed to being the first fraternity to become a national organization in 1831. Zeta Phi Beta Sorority Incorporated, a prominent historically black sorority and founded in Washington D.C. in 1921, was the very first Greek-letter-organization ever to establish a chapter in Africa. Today Zeta Phi Beta has chapters in Europe, the Caribbean in addition to Africa (Kimbrough, The Foundational Era of Black Fraternalism, 2003).

Early sorority and fraternity societies in the USA reflected the same homophobia, racism and class privileges that were very prevalent in the wider society and still do today. As such, the early Greek societies were exclusively white. The first Black Greek Letter Organization (BGLOs) was not established until 1906 and before that time African Americans were not permitted to join any other Greek-letter organizations. Soon after BGLOs were established Latino Greek Letter Organizations (LGOs) and Multicultural Greek Organizations (MGLOs) also were established. Lambda Theta Phi Fraternity Inc., first LGO was established December 1, 1975 and Mu Sigma Upsilon Sorority Inc. was the first MGLO was established on November 21, 1981. And today a variety of Greek letter organizations have become distinguished from the primarily

functioning as social groups by being specifically organized with a focus on the social advancement of a historically discriminated against minority community; offering a combination of service to the community, professional advancement, and scholastic achievement (Kimbrough, *The Future of Black Greek Life*, 2003).

Every undergraduate sorority and or fraternal organization recognized by the Sorority and Fraternity Greek Life system reports and is accountable to a governing council on their campus and nationally. The structure and culture of sororities and fraternities reflect the structure governing council. Governing councils, national and local organizations, are almost exactly like the sorority and fraternity individual chapter organizations previously described, the only difference being the larger governing aspect and composition of individuals from separate chapters. Therefore, there are approximately six nationally recognized governing councils to which individual sorority and fraternities belong. On the local level, there also exist smaller governing councils that organize sororities and fraternities on each college or university campus. These local governing councils are run by undergraduate students and report in the first instance to the Sorority and Fraternity Life departments of their respective institutions. Some local governing councils also report to their nationally recognized governing councils. (Torbenson, 2005) (T. Brown, 2005)

The **North-American Interfraternity Conference (NIC)** was established in 1909 and is the national governing council for seventy-four (inter)national fraternities. These fraternities are prominent on most collegiate campuses and are predominately historically white fraternities that have been founded since the beginning of the 1800s. Local governing councils that report to the NIC are usually named Interfraternity Council and colloquially referred to as

IFC. This is also the name of the local governing council at The Ohio State University-Interfraternity Council (IFC). (Torbenson, 2005)

The **National Panhellenic Conference (NPC)**, established in 1902, is a national umbrella organization for 26 (inter)national women's sororities. Like the fraternities in NIC, these sororities are prominent on most collegiate campuses and are predominately white historically sororities that have been founded since the mid-1850s. Local governing councils that report to the NPC are often named or nicknamed Panhellenic Association or PHA. PHA is also the name given to the governing council at The Ohio State University. (Torbenson, 2005)

The **National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC)** is a joint organization of nine historically African American, international Greek lettered fraternities and sororities. The NPHC was established as a permanent organization on May 10, 1930 and was incorporated under the laws of the State of Illinois in 1937. The nine NPHC organizations are often times referred to as the "Divine Nine". Unlike IFC or PHA local governing organizations, local NPHC governing councils have the same acronym and only allow membership to the previously established nine historically African American sororities and fraternities. (T. Brown, 2005) (Kimbrough, The Foundational Era of Black Fraternalism)

The **National APIA Panhellenic Association** (or **NAPA**, formerly known as the National Asian Greek Council) is collaboration of collegiate Asian or Asian-interest fraternities and sororities that began in 2005. The National APIA Panhellenic Association was officially organized on August 12, 2006. Currently there are ten sorority and fraternities that are members of the council. The purpose of the association is to create an umbrella organization that can unite Asian Fraternities and Sororities onto common causes and facilitate communication between

the various organizations. In addition, the **National Association of Latino Fraternal Organizations (NALFO)**, established in 1998, is a national umbrella council for 19 Latino Greek Letter Organizations. The purpose of NALFO is to promote and foster positive interfraternal relations, communication, and development of all Latino fraternal organizations through mutual respect, leadership, honesty, professionalism and education. (Torbenson, 2005)

Last but certainly not least is the **National Multicultural Greek Council (NMGC)**, established in 1998, is a national umbrella council for ten Multicultural Greek Letter Organizations. The purpose of NMGC is to provide a forum that allows for the free exchange of ideas, programs, and services between its constituent fraternities and sororities; to promote the awareness of multicultural diversity within collegiate institutions, their surrounding communities, and the greater community-at-large and to support and promote the works of its member organizations. Unlike the NIC, NPC, and NPHC the sorority and fraternities that are members of NAPA, NALFO, and or NMGC are commonly referred to as Multicultural Greek-letter organizations. And so while chapters may be national members of separate national councils, these Multicultural sorority and fraternities often join together to form Independent Greek Councils (IGC) (uncommon) or the more common Unified Greek Council (UGC) or Multicultural Greek Councils (MGC or MCGC). Like other local governing councils- IFC, PHA, NPHC- UGC or MCGC are undergraduate student run. However the UGC or MCGC local governing councils only report to the local Sorority and Fraternity Life departments at their respective institutions as there is no one umbrella organization to which all multicultural Greek-letter organizations belong currently. (T. Brown, 2005) (Kimbrough, The Foundational Era of Black Fraternalism)

The influence of mainstream societal culture can be seen in the Greek system within the composition of Greek-letter governing councils and is embodied in the chapters who are members under these governing councils - national then locally. Historically Black Greek-letter organizations as well as Multicultural Greek-letter organizations are a great example of how the mainstream and ethnic cultures shape the values and beliefs held in these organizations. BGLO and MGLOs come out of an arduous history of discrimination and struggle both within mainstream and Greek societies. This history that led to the establishment of BGLO and MGLOs remains a contemporary reality, even if altered for the communities from which the organizations were birthed and continue to receive their members. Thus one should almost expect and not be surprised, to find the beliefs, values, practices, and mores found in African, Latino, Asian, and Multi-racial American cultures- as well as the wider USA society- to be then present and or build upon within BGLO and MGLOs.

Pledging and expressions of pride for an organization for BGLOs and MGLOs are very different from historically white sorority and fraternities. *Pledging* or what is formally known as the *Associate Member Process* is a term used to describe the process through which one joins a sorority or fraternity. Moreover, pledging is a central aspect to BGLO and MGLO identity associated with the organization. These process take place over a period of time and involve several tasks, activities, and objectives that must be completed in order to prove an individual ready or worthy enough to be a member of a specific organization. Yet, these processes are vaguely understood to those outside the African American, Latino American, Asian American, and Multi-racial communities. Stepping and strolling are two key forms of pledging that are unique to these minority ethnicity-based organizations. Stepping and strolling cannot be

accurately described as line-dancing but will serve for the sake of a simplistic definition. Stepping and strolling, in the same way as *chanting*, are two important aspects of BGLOs and MGLOs and are usually performed to show pride for an organization. Pledging and these expressions of pride for your organizations have been explained as a minority Greek culture within a larger Greek culture since historically white sororities and fraternities have not traditionally had these aspects as a part of their Greek culture. Additionally, the pledging process and pride expressions have strong ties back to traditions within ethnic communities in American and globally. Both BGLO and MGLO come out of an arduous history of discrimination and struggle and this history that led to the establishment of BGLOs and MGLOs remains a contemporary reality, even if altered for the communities from which the organizations were birthed and continue to receive their members. Thus one should almost expect and not be surprised to find the beliefs, values, practices, and mores found in African, Latino, Asian, and Multi-racial American cultures – as well as the wider USA society - to be present and influential in BGLOs and MGLOs. (Kimbrough, The History of Pledging)

Research Methodology

My original intention was to carry out qualitative and feminist research methods (see Section 5 Research Methodology) to design and conduct individual interviews, amongst past and present LGBTQ minority students who are or have been members of Greek-letter organizations in order to gather their accounts of their experiences and views of being members of minority Greek student organizations. My intention was then to use the collected

data to further examine the intersections of race, gender, class, and sexuality in relation to the experience of minority LGBTQ sorority and fraternity students in Greek-letter organizations within the Sorority and Fraternity Life system and identity construction. However, I could not carry out this original research plan because I was not able to secure IRB clearance for this research in time. Consequently, the planned qualitative research could not go ahead. Instead, it was necessary to adapt my research plan relying on secondary materials as well as my recollections of naturally occurring conversations between myself and LGBTQ friends and associates. In some respects, then this research has become a kind of autoethnography, in which I draw on my own experiences as a Black, lesbian Greek member. This is in line with Ellis and Bochner's view that autoethnography, is more a form of writing than a method of research and one that makes "the researcher's own experience a topic of investigation in its own right" (Ellis and Bochner cited in Porter 2004) rather than seeming "as if they're written from nowhere by nobody" (p. 734). Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (*graphy*) *personal experience (auto) in order to* understand cultural experience (*ethno*). As a method, autoethnography combines characteristics of *autobiography and ethnography*. When researchers do *autoethnography*, they *retrospectively and selectively write* about concepts that stem from, or are made possible by, being part of a culture and/or by possessing a particular cultural identity. Autoethnography is an analysis of personal experience in order to understand cultural experiences for those who maybe outsiders as well insiders to these experiences.

In order to reflect the research process as a whole I shall present the original research plan before going on to discuss the revised research process resulting from the changed circumstances.

Original Research Design

This research set out to investigate the experiences of minority ethnic LGBTQ students within the Greek Life system. The starting premise of this research was that despite many improvements, homophobia remains a problem within Greek student organizations and having a negative impact on the capacity of LGBTQ and especially perhaps LGBTQ ethnic minority students to fully participate in Greek life. The aim of this research was to verify the validity of this claim and to develop proposals and recommendations for future action to further ensure the full and equal inclusion of LGBTQ students in Greek life.

The objectives of this research are to:

- A. Use a range of theories and perspectives to critically reflect on and analyze how the categories of race, gender, sex, and class are discursively produced and materially located, rather than simply naturally occurring phenomena.
- B. Analyze these categories and their intersections within discourses, processes and practices of social regulation, resistance, and freedom, especially as this affects the experiences of LGBTQ minority students within the sorority and fraternity life system.
- C. Use qualitative and feminist research methods to designed and conduct individual and focus group interviews, as well as self-completed questionnaires amongst past and

present LGBTQ minority students who are or have been members of Greek-letter organizations in order to gather their accounts of their experiences and views of being members of minority Greek student organizations

- D. Use the collected data to examine the intersections of race, gender, class, and sexuality in relation to the experience of minority LGBTQ sorority and fraternity students in Greek-letter organizations within the Sorority and Fraternity Life system and identity construction.

Methods of Procedure

The data for this qualitative study will be collected from a small sample of 10-15 minority LGBTQ sorority and fraternity students aged 19 or older residing in central Ohio. These persons will be current students at various certified collegiate institutions and will be currently active Greek members of their chapters and governing councils meaning they will be in good standing with their college or university and Sorority and Fraternity Life at their institution. All participants that decline to be interviewed will be asked to fill-out a short, voluntary survey that will ask those who decline what are the reasons behind the decline (e.g. fear of harassment or injury). All those who consent to being interviewed, will be asked the same questions including:

- how they define themselves in terms of the key social identifiers?;
- how feel in their respective organizations, if they have dealt with adverse situations because of their LGBTQ identity, and
- how, in terms of their own self-defined identifications, they negotiated their place within Greek Life.

I am anticipating that most of the data will be gathered through individual face-to-face interviews. However, recognizing that this is a time and resource-limited piece of research on a sensitive subject area, I have decided to include the option of both an on-line self-completed questionnaire and on-line personal interviews. This addresses the difficulty I have already encountered in getting sufficient number of volunteers amongst current students.

Specifically, self-completed questionnaires may be more comfortable for some individuals who are particularly cautious about their sexual orientation being revealed or widely known.

Research Ethics

Due to the sensitivity of my research subject matter within a still largely homophobic society, there are a few ethical issues that I will need to bear in mind. These are: -

- a) **Confidentiality:** Private, anonymized interviews lasting no more than two hours will be conducted with willing participants. Interviews will be conducted in person or on-line (Skype or telephone). Participants will be told that all privacy rights and procedures will be used in the conduct and storage of the research and research information, and their identity in the form of a number and false first name will be assigned to their interview data and remain confidential. Participants will also not be required to reveal specific sorority or fraternity memberships or chapters. The only required information would be details of to which national and local governing council they are affiliated. If participants give consent interviews will be recorded via voice recording device, otherwise

interviews will be recorded using notes taken at the time. Digital voice media can be encrypted and password protected thus being the safest alternative for protecting and keeping the information of participants confidential.

b) **Dealing with sensitive issues:** Some individuals may not be out regarding their sexuality, or may be only partially out (i.e. out at university but not to their families). Therefore, it is possible that just being part of the research process may raise concerns or distress for some individuals. In order to address this, I will do the following two things: -

- i. Clearly indicate at the start of an interview that the interviewee is free to terminate the interview at any point if they feel they no longer wish to proceed.
- ii. Have available a list of LGBTQ, counseling and other support and social organizations to give to interviewees at the end of the interview.

Revised Research Procedure

The data used for this study came from my personal experiences as a Black lesbian Greek society member and as well as an out and active leader within the Greek system. I was always out within a close group of people as soon as I arrived to my institution; this group grew as I became more and more comfortable 'coming out of the closet'. However, I was not always out in my Greek collegiate experience. There were other student organizations and groups (such as scholars, leadership, and pre-medicine and community service groups), in which I made the decision to conceal my lesbian identity and 'pass as straight' in order to 'blend in'. I felt this

was important if I wanted to rise in the ranks in various organizations and stay at a high level of involvement, as in these organizations there is a high premium place on religious identity or spirituality. I went as far as making up fake boyfriends or interests so that I would not be detected. This behavior went on until junior year of college. My reasons behind this were simple to me but complicated for peers I knew who were open about their LGBTQ identity. For my entire collegiate career I had always been heavily involved in student organizations of various types but most had big focuses on diversity and multiculturalism. I feel as though I am a natural leader and went on to hold many leadership positions even at the same time. I wanted to be taken seriously and respected. Being open about my gay identity as a black woman in many of the organizations I was and am still apart of, I felt, at the time would have tainted the image of myself and my name I worked so hard to build up on campus. And when I took my position as President of MCGC, I began to make a lot of positive changes and advances for my council right away. I didn't want my gay identity to be the downfall or some pitfall in my council, sorority, and fellow MCGC members loss of respect in the great Ohio State Greek society. But before I was Greek, I had always known I wanted to go Greek but because of the vast variety of Greek organizations within my family, I did not want to choose a particular organization right away. Therefore, I just knew and or made a decision that making that aspect of my identity known would not be a good idea. Unfortunately, I was still faced with a situation where my sexuality was challenged in which I was asked to do something with an individual of the opposite sex I couldn't and wouldn't do because I was gay. Even after making it known that I was gay at the time of the situation it was disregarded and I was asked to the task again but I refused. As a result, I began a less traveled road within the Greek community, by going off and

founding the Phi Chapter of Delta Xi Phi Multicultural Sorority Inc. with my 10 line sisters¹, Ohio State's first and only multicultural sorority. Even still, I kept my LGBTQ affiliation secret. Even during my process on line² with my line sisters, I never told anyone. However, as my participation in various LGBTQ organizations increased and my desire to just be myself rose, it became almost impossible to keep hiding a part of myself from my sisters. With much encouragement from many different people, I made a giant step and began to reveal my LGBTQ affiliation and I started just by telling sisters in my own sorority. But this was one of the most terrifying experiences of my life so I can remember telling a number of sisters and friends I was bisexual in order to break the ice and so it wouldn't seem too left field. Looking back, I regret having done so because while I could see men as physically attractive, I had no sexual feeling or orientation towards them whatsoever. Nevertheless, I will always be proud of myself for just taking the step to tell others as it would have been easier to stay silent. Once I gained more confidence I let more people know I was in fact a lesbian. With further encouragement from the Director of Sorority and Fraternity Life over numerous meetings and one-on-one sessions, I was able to let others in my council known (at the time I was President of the Multicultural Greek Council).

In the study that follows in addition to my own experiences, I also in particular I draw on a series of conversations I have had with fellow minority LGBTQ students both within and outside of the Greek system here at OSU. Some of these students had been recruited to participate in

¹ Line sister is someone who goes through the process to become a sister for an organization with you, same for line brother

² *On line* is terminology used to describe an individual going through the process to get into an organization

my planned research ahead of gaining IRB approval. Because of the delay in the IRB process, I subsequently was able to gain their consent for me to use recollections of conversations.

In this study, I refer to six fellow students who I name as Alyceha, Bri'anna, Carmel, GregCedar, Nick and Nicki (pseudonyms). All six students were minority LGBTQ students and four were sorority and fraternity students aged between 18 and 22. All were residing in central Ohio. All persons were current students at The Ohio State University at the time of the conversation and active Greek members of their chapters and governing councils; meaning they were in good standing with the university and their sorority/fraternity and Sorority and Fraternity Life at OSU.

Drawing on my original research questions, I chose to structure my reflections and analysis around the same thematic headings, which are as follows - how they define themselves in terms of the key social identifiers?; how feel in their respective organizations, if they have dealt with adverse situations because of their LGBTQ identity, and how, in terms of their own self-defined identifications, they negotiated their place within Greek Life.

As noted already, this research set out to investigate the experiences of minority ethnic LGBTQ students within the Greek Life through the use of feminist qualitative research interviews. However, I was unable to secure IRB approval in time to complete the research as originally planned. This section explains how I adapted my research design to accommodate the changed circumstances of this study.

Evaluation of the research process: auto-ethnography

Throughout the planning of this research my advisor had been encouraging me to consider using auto-ethnography, because this would allow me to utilize my own experiences as a Black lesbian Greek member as a key aspect of my research data. In addition, as it became clear that the IRB approval would at best be very late, my advisor and I also discussed having a back-up plan should approval come too late for this work to be completed on time. It became clear that drawing on auto-ethnography would be a useful in addressing both those factors. Auto-ethnography is both a research method and a process of writing.

The term “autoethnography” was first introduced by Mary Louise Pratt in 1992 in her book *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (Pratt, 1992). Catherine Russell explains that Pratt’s use of the word was an oppositional one that sought to challenge the power of European anthropologists to categorize, research and define the experience of the rest of the world; “If ethnographic texts are a means by which Europeans represent to themselves their (usually subjugated) others, autoethnographic texts are those the others construct in response to or in dialogue with those metropolitan representations.” (Pratt cited in Russell, 1999). Therefore, autoethnography is particularly associated with researchers in marginalized groups, who find themselves in a position to be the producers of research and knowledge, not just its objects. However autoethnographies are somewhat controversial, Robert Krizek contributed a chapter to *Expressions of Ethnography* edited by Robin Patric Clair in which he explains his concerns of autoethnography dissolving into narcissism. But I would argue that

autoethnographies while personal tie in interpersonal experiences as well and are usually political in nature calling attention to issues in culture that have been continuously overlooked making it possible for social change. Autoethnographers must not only use their methodological tools and research literature to analyze experience, but also must consider ways others may experience similar concepts. For this reason, once it became clear that my original research plan could not be carried out I came around to seeing the value of using an autoethnographic approach. I myself could be in some ways part of the research data, using my own insights and experiences as a black lesbian and my own friendship and conversations.

Given that I now would not be able to undertake my research as planned, and recognizing the lack of secondary texts on this topic, initially it looked as if this project would need to be abandoned. However, again with further urging from my advisor I began to see how auto-ethnography would provide a way around this obstacle that in some ways might produce an equally valid piece of research. As an active and out lesbian holding positions of leadership within the Greek system, I came to realize that I have a wealth of experience and knowledge gained through this involvement and through my own identity. One of the strengths of auto-ethnography is that it challenges the idea that 'knowledge' is only something that is objective and neutral.

Even though some researchers still assume that research can be done from a neutral, impersonal, and objective stance [...] most now recognize that such an assumption is not tenable [...] Consequently, autoethnography is one of the approaches that acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher's influence on research, rather than hiding from these matters or assuming they don't exist (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011).

In other words, autoethnography allows for an autobiographical element in the research process, whereby the researcher is both subject and object of the inquiry and a “common feature of autoethnography is the first-person voice-over that is intently and unambiguously subjective” according to Russell (Russell, 1999). With this in mind, I decided to base my research on secondary reading, my firsthand experience as a Black lesbian Greek and naturally occurring personal conversations that I had participated in during my period here at OSU as a student and Greek society member. I was able to ask for and receive signed permission to use the conversations as research material.

As an African American lesbian undergraduate, I brought my own insights awareness and experiences of being a minority LGBTQ Greek society member to this research. Having to personally steer myself through my multiple intersections of my own identity(ies) served as an important resource in the research process. At the same time I recognize the limitations of this approach and the possible accusation that the conclusions I draw are based on data that is too subjective, lacking in objectivity and too narrowly focused on my own and a few other people’s experiences. However, how do those with less power and who suffer the threat of discrimination and invisibility, get to seize hold of the means of creating new knowledge from our own lived realities and so refuse to collude with our own social invisibility? This is what motivated in my own decision to come out as a lesbian with the Greek system, for in so doing I am resisting my own erasure and claiming empowered visibility on my own terms. For me this limited journey into auto-ethnography, started in response to the obstacles and hurdles that often limit those who normally are the objects of research from ‘seizing control of the pen’ as it

were. To those who might question both my method and findings, I acknowledge I have scarcely done justice to auto-ethnography, but I believe I have made use of it in a way that is valid and makes an important contribution to both knowledge and social justice. This is consistent with the view that “[a]utoethnographers view research and writing as socially-just acts; rather than a preoccupation with accuracy, the goal is to produce analytical, accessible texts that change us and the world we live in for the better” (Ellis, Adams and Bohner, 2011)

Literature Review

In reviewing the literature on Greek life, I found that until quite recent times, there has scarcely been any discussion of homophobia or of LGBTQ issues, in relation to Sorority and Fraternity. I could locate no book, creed, student organization constitution, article, leadership handbooks or manuals that referred to Greek life alongside LGBTQ issues. Still of the small portion of literature and or media that brings up the two subjects they tend to focus on or around trivial issues such as members dating within the same organization or various chapters being deemed the “gay chapter.”

Generally, conversations around the subject of minority LGBTQ Greek students are considered a taboo topic, rarely if ever discussed. While the atmosphere on campuses and possibly within local chapters is becoming more affirming and/ or open-minded, several national organizations have yet to openly endorse or embrace the LGBTQ community, lifestyle or the LGBTQ members they currently have. Here is where one finds a difference between what the Greek community says and what is actually going on in practice. In numerous conversations, I have had with LGBTQ students many members have told me that they felt they dared not be out before and during their intake process in order to successfully complete that process and cross over into the brother or sisterhood. Often times it is only after an individual crosses that later they can come out or “out enough” (Carmel, personal conversation) within their organization. As a result, homophobia creates obstacles when it comes to minority LGBTQ members being active, productive members of their organization.

In my experience, as an active member with a leadership position within the Greek system, I have come to recognize that minority LGBTQ Greek members are often ideal members in every aspect - except for their sexuality, tending to show loyalty to their respective organizations that surpasses the first commitment any individual has to themselves-their own happiness. This begs the question now, how minority LGBTQ Greek members evaluate their self-worth with their organizations? These are the same Greek organizations that are supposedly dedicated to the encouragement, support, improvement and development of these members. Further, how and or what is ensuring the survival, even thriving of minority LGBTQ Greek students? Minority LGBTQ Greek students continue to exist in organizations where the very mention of one small facet of their identity is considered controversial and even unacceptable for their chapters and or their national organizations. One can only imagine the confusion this might entail for many students, particularly as more campuses, like The Ohio State University, are paying more and better attention to cultural sensitivity and promoting diversity. The aims of these initiatives are to establish a safer, more open-minded campus community. However, an important community with which a minority LGBTQ and or minority LGBTQ Greek student identifies does not accept or full embrace them as an individual merely because of that individual's sexual orientation. Greek-letter organizations serve more people beyond those who are members in their organizations. They do work in and around their campus communities but are also affiliated with their ethnic or otherwise supporting communities who have subsequently created them. These supporting and or ethnic communities connected to Greek-letter organizations have a great deal of influential power and presence around Greek-letter organizations. The evident homophobia seen within the Greek

community I want to suggest starts in the supporting and or ethnic communities. The complexity of being a minority, LGBTQ, *and* a Greek student/member becomes more difficult to navigate as multiple aspects of that individuals' life involves the battle of having to deal with all or multiple intersections of difference and discrimination at once.

Queer theory works to describe the very experience of navigating multiple identities or intersections by expanding on gay/lesbian and feminists' studies, both of which primarily focus on challenging the notion of gender and questioning behavior put into categories of *natural* or *unnatural*. Queer theorists mainly attempt to deconstruct the rigid categorization of sexuality and gender identity, arguing that identities are not fixed but a composition of a variety of life experiences, up-bringing, belief systems, culture and so on. Hence, queer theorists tend to challenge the limitation placed upon individuals to adhere to a few narrowly defined categories of gender and sexuality. "T queer theory said that there is an interval between what a subject "does" (role-taking) and what a subject "is" (the self). So, despite its title, the goal is to deconstruct identity categories, namely, those designed to identify the "sexed subject", that is categories of sexual orientation." (Halperin, 2008)

American social psychology professor, Claude M. Steele, has introduced the concept of *stereotype threat* to discuss the impact of stereotyping on Black students' attainment. Stereotype threat is defined as "the threat of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype, or the fear of doing something that would inadvertently confirm that stereotype." (C. Steele, 1999) In Steele's article *Thin Ice: Stereotype Threat and Black College Students*, he details the result of lower grades and drop out rates of African American students among their white counterparts across social economic status within the African American community. The

numerous negative stereotypes associated with being Black and or African American community accounts for and or is correlated to poor or lower academic performance among Black students, as students either internalize low expectations or their fear of other people's low expectations and hyper-criticism starts to impact their performance. Steel's concept of stereotype threat speaks volumes to the actions and precautions taken by minority LGBTQ individuals as well as minority LGBTQ Greek students. Being LGBTQ or even supporting queer issues is not seen as a positive trait within mainstream culture thus the negative stereotype attached to queer sexuality which has nothing to do with the individual is unfortunately attached regardless.

Now looking at Greek national organizations and chapters, I wonder if perhaps an aspect of their fear of a change in relation to being seen as more tolerant of sexual difference may be to do with a concern or fear of a negative stigma being attached to their organization. Additionally, they may also have the fear and unwanted attention being drawn to the chapter if one member or more is seen out and open in the LGBTQ community.

Queer theorist, Jose Esteban Munoz, has introduced significant insights on how individuals seen as deviant or outsiders negotiate mainstream culture through a process called "disidentification." Munoz explains "there is more to identity than identifying with one's culture or standing solidly against it. Those outside the racial and sexual mainstream negotiate majority culture—not by aligning themselves with or against exclusionary works but rather by transforming these works for their own cultural purposes" and survival. (Munoz, 1996)

Disidentifications illustrates a queer individual's attempt to mold and shape their existence on, with, and against dominant or mainstream culture. This is important as several minority LGBTQ

Greek students that I have spoken with have mentioned how complicated it was to be in their organizations. In her paper *Dispora Dis/Identification and the Politics of Black Embodiment*, Denise Noble, expands on Munoz's disidentificaiton saying "I want to qualify that and suggest that disidentificaiton is the point of disjuncture where identification, counter-identification and *misidentification* meet; where the disciplinary logic of bio-power meets its own generative and productive potential to produce dissonant identifications." (Noble 200: 3). So on the one hand these students love, identify with, and uphold their organizations to the fullest - they enjoy the traditions and rituals that have been passed down for many years. Yet on another hand, these same students are unable to be completely truthful with themselves as they consciously deny specific aspects of themselves to be visible out of fear their being authentic will taint the image of their organization. These students consider putting their organization before themselves a being respectful to the organizatrion, and something they have to do in order to survive personally but also for the survival of their organization.

The Minority LGBTQ Student Experience

"It tends to be the end all be all for some people, but at this point in my life I want to set an example for my future children, my friends and family, so it shouldn't matter if I am in a same-sex relationship or not but [it does].....So I [will] prove that I am the same or better than you." - (Nicki, personal conversation)

I am uncomfortable most at work, I work here at the Ohio Union. Its scary, and that might have more to do with the law, particularly here in ohio there is no law protecting the LGBTQ community. I don't disclose my sexuality to my co-works because I know it might get back to my supervisors or manager and I could be potentially fired for it or it could just be used against me. And that is perfectly legal for them to do so. – (Nick, personal conversation)

During my time as a student at OSU, it has become clear to me that the current higher education research on LGBTQ and minority LGBTQ collegiate students rarely offers a complete picture of those students' overall collegiate experiences. Most of the literature I have come across, on LGBTQ or minority LGBTQ students focuses on the discrimination many of these students face based on their sexuality and or how their sexuality affects the relationships- romantic, friendship, mentor and otherwise- these students have. (Longerbeam, 2007) While this information is at the least significant, LGBTQ students are foremost *students* attending colleges and universities where they are student leaders in organizations, volunteers, straight 'A' students, student employees and may even like to go out to parties. There is very little printed material exploring these experiences from the viewpoint of these young LGBTQ adults. I have often felt that so much of what is written about the lives of LGBTQ individuals focuses on the sexual aspect of the human being as opposed to the character that makes up each person and as a result the entire community has become negatively stigmatized as a result.

“Most of the problems I encountered were with my black peers at my institution questioning me, it was a tough obstacle I really didn’t anticipate...along that same line I got the same kind of pressure from my LGBTQ friends, things like ‘wasn’t our club good enough.’ When you have multiple identities people may share one of those identities it is very rare that someone else will shares all of your other identities and when they look at you they only see that identity they have in common with you. So it’s different when you have multiple identities because what is salient to you will depend on the context. Having an LBGTQ identity wasn’t an issue for me it was much more pressing that I was a black in an all-white community. The black people could only see that black thing. The gay people could only see that gay thing. So that presented issues for me having multiple identities and having to navigate through all of them kind of all at once. - (Alyceha, personal conversation)

Once instance of this I experienced took place in an African American and African Studies course I took. The class was made up of all African-American/African students apart from one white American male student. The professor was also a Black woman. In one session on the experience of black gay and lesbian youth, several of the young men in the group expressed their disgust and fear of gay and lesbian black people. Only two people at this point knew I was a lesbian in the class - my professor and a friend whom I was taking the class with. The young men were able to acknowledge that LGBTQ people could be ‘just like them’ but still expressed ideas that somehow being LGBTQ made you inherently different. For example, when the conversation turned to how some of the heterosexual men in the group would feel if they discovered a good male friend was gay they reacted with intensified emotion, saying they would feel betrayed and even scared that they had been duped and misled and that the friendship would be over. When I asked the young man who made this comment if he would actually be friends with an openly gay male I described who was very similar to him, he replied “probably not.” So I then asked what would be the point of the young gay man revealing his

sexuality if you wouldn't befriend him otherwise? The young man in the class couldn't/wouldn't answer me. A different young man in class went further and said unless he knew from the very beginning a close friend was gay only that would that change his mind about not being friends with LGBTQ individuals. He also mentioned how he had respect for LGBTQ individuals who were out from the start and who were "keeping it real." The same young man felt indifferent about lesbians as he didn't see anything wrong with same sex relationships among females and he thought it was somewhat attractive. I was outraged but hurt more than anything. Aside from the professor and my friend only one other female student advocated for LGBTQ individuals. The class concluded more or less that it was the LGBTQ individuals job to be out or open about their sexuality or else they weren't "keeping it real" regardless of the social or possible economic consequences. Where that kind of existence is supposed to lead me, I have no clue.

Another prominent obstacle for minority LGBTQ students is the balancing act we have to do in relation to all of the intersectionalities, which make up our identity. Of course, all identities are crosscut by differences of class, gender and so on. However, s in the label minority these LGBTQ individuals also have their ethnic communities perspectives and beliefs of the queer community to contend with in addition to merely facing discrimination because of their LGBTQ affiliation. Subquent identities like one's sex, gender identity, regilous convictions, etc. become or may seem further marginalized by their over archin minority LGBTQ identities. As Alyceha mentioned in her quote above, being a lesbian was the least of her issues, being of an ethnic minority was what presented her the most problems however issues with her LGBTQ friends and supports arose unwantedly. Not being able to surround yourself with other individuals most similar to youself because you are such a unique individual cannot be an easy

existence. Steel's concept of stereotype threat further explains with research studies how various additional, undesired stressors or aspects of day-to-day student life can negatively affect the academic performance of minority students. The ability of minority LGBTQ students to be vigilant and cognizant of themselves and others as it relates to identity and self concept is again not an easy task and one that takes an extreme amount of energy, self policing, and objectivity. All these things while they could build a person's character are probably exhausting after so much time ensues and therefore time consuming so much that one could assume is time away from studying and away from the primary job of being a student.

Research Discussion and Conclusions

In the naturally occurring conversations that were used as research while all participants were minority LGBTQ students, some were simply affiliated or very familiar with Greek Life so not all were Greek members. Still there many trending topics throughout all conversations had. Some of the main ones were: - fear of a change in one's public image versus Greek members; fear of the community being homophobic ; anxiety over the idea of Greek members being just 'out enough', but only after having been accepted into their respective organizations and finally, putting the needs of their organization before their own.

Frequently in my conversations with LGBTQ fellow students, I have heard references to the 'fear' of homophobia and racism from other Greeks and or Greek organizations.

"In the Black community peroid, there is still a negative connotation behind LGBTQ, so when it comes to invdividuals in organizations it only takes one (moves hand to symbolize the number 1), it only takes one member to be out and your whole organization gets labeled 'gay' and because of the negative connotation that is a bad thing and also not something easily changed." - (Bri'anna, personal conversation)

"There is still rampid homophobia in [name of Greek council deleted], specifcly here [at OSU] and just the fact of having your image out there for the entire Greek community there is a pressure to not support that [LGBTQ] due to stereotypes and stigmas about the LGBTQ community. No chapter wants to be labeled like the 'gay chapter.' There is a lot of worry I've learned taking in LGBTQ especially men because of the image it will represent. Fraternity men, more Frat men like to present themselves as macho, you know so there is still a lot of homophobia there, no one wants to be the gay dude or have one in their chapter. And I think that is a huge issue to where they can't put that aside and see its not necessarily their sexuality but what these men are doing with their lives not what they are doing in the bedroom. I'm president of my chapter but even still I feel as though some of my own brothers see me as a person but still correlate my sexuality into that and though I identity as a gay, it doesn't have anything to do with how I run the chapter or how I am as a brother. I find myself especially when around other chapter

presidents or offericers, like at [Greek] meetings, sort of policing myself so I am not so myself, I am always cautious and watch my mannerisms, not so much for protection, but in order to make it not be an issue and the other guys can be more comfortable so I downplay myself. I can never wait for [Greek] meetings to be over because they are so nerve-wrecking.” – (GregCedar, personal conversation)

“A lot of it, a lot of what we percieve the homophobia in Greek organizations to be, is really a fear of a change in image. So its not that the Greek students are less progressive then their non-greek peers or that they are more homophobic or like more afraid of being around gay people as much as it is, because the LGBTQ identity is not one that is fully accepted in society- and it’s still controversial-so they [Greek community] try to steer clear from producing that image. So like for awhile when me and my girlfriend were out and dating my sisters complained “now people are going to think we’re the ‘lesbian sorority’ and they could care less that we were dating but they were very worried we would be labeled the lesbian sorority and being tagged by that label. People feel that is is such an identity that once enough people find out, it will take over once you find out that its there.” - (Alyceha, personal conversation)

In these three quotes Alyceha, Bri’anna, and GregCedar quite perfectly sum up what I and many other students have encountered. Many heterosexual Greeks, especially in one-on-one situations, are not afraid and definitely not against LGBTQ individuals. However despite this acceptance on an individual level the lack of a strong lead from the leadership of Greek organizations, means that to come out as LGBTQ or even LGBTQ friendly feels risky. I know of no Black LGBTQ Greek who wants to be the openly ‘gay sorority or fraternity’ person in their local chapter. This fear strongly relates back to Steel’s concept of stereotype threat and the embodied sometimes justified, sometimes irrational fear felt by an individual or group that feels they are in danger of confirming a negative stereotype. In this situation minority LGBTQ Greeks and organizations have very few options if they wish to remain in the good light of their

communities and society at large. However, how much good can come out of making select members suppress part of who they are in order to further the organization?

In my experience, minority LGBTQ Greek members limit their LGBTQ affiliations once in their organizations. This involves placing their organizations before themselves. This is another way in which LGBTQ students can try to mitigate stereotype threat. While LGBTQ friends and associates who are non-Greek have spoken directly to me about this issue, Greek members made mention of the same issue but in more indirect ways.

“You can’t help how someone was raised, my sisters collectively support me, so that’s enough. Now there may be some individuals who think I am wrong but when we all come together, we’re all sisters. My chapter here doesn’t seek to change me, they want to refine me there is a difference. I don’t know that I would change anything, for some organizations you can’t change 100 plus years of history and honestly I don’t know if I want to change it. We are making strides to change and be a better community so that should be enough. Now one of my organization’s principles is encompassing that femininity we have as women and pushes members to be finer women. So I know that may seem like it is not supportive of someone like myself who is androgynous and likes to be androgynous but it is something I pledged to live by and I will live my ritual until the day I die. Now I’m going to me regardless, I have strong backbone and I don’t care what people say or think I am going to be who I am, I am okay.” – (Bri’anna, personal conversation)

“There are members of the LGBTQ community in any type of organization and in every organization even Christian student organizations. Now whether those individuals choose to let people know or cover it up that’s something different. But I feel like, even though they [Greek council] say ‘we don’t discriminate against this person, that person’ everyone has to say that or else there could be law suits. But when it gets down to it, the nitty gritty type they do discriminate. Oh it’s a big problem, people are not choosing to speak on it but individuals continue to either not be picked up or not initiated down the road simply because their sexual orientation. There might even be members in the organization that are [LGBTQ] but they were not out before they got in, you can hid who you are to become a part of something where certain people within the organization would normally and do discriminate.” (Carmel, personal conversation)

At first glance, this issue may seem not as related or an entirely different concern, as Carmel mentions that individuals can choose to let others know about their LGBTQ identity or not. Still discrimination against such minority LGBTQ students is of the utmost concern and the reasoning behind why some persons continue to discriminate need further examination. While individuals, specifically minority LGBTQ, may be choosing not to disclose their LGBTQ identity this decision is rarely made out of selfish motives. As Munoz, demonstrated with his concept of disidentification, because of the intersectional identifications within minority LGBTQ individuals, they identify with various aspects of mainstream norms concerning masculinity and femininity. Yet the same individuals may play with the boundaries of gender identity in order to rebel against the constraints of dominant gender constructions. In this situation, minority LGBTQ students make decisions based on their safety, intersecting interests, and survival, which in turn are somewhat dependent on other variables. Queer theory that says there is an interval between what a subject “does” (role-taking) and what a subject “is” (the self), identities are not fixed but a composition of a variety of life experiences, up-bringing, belief systems, culture and etc. LGBTQ students make decisions and or perform certain modes or codes of gendered conduct not always because they want to or because they are pleasurable, but for an end result they identify with in part, in whole, or want to defy. This is a very complicated practice of critical performativity that LGBTQ, especially minority LGBTQ individuals have had to develop to address and negotiate the multiple intersectionalities that play a role in the composition of their self-identities and to deal with racism and homophobia. Despite its complexities, it is a

mode of survival and as well as self-creativity that LGBTQ students will continue to develop, so long as homophobia remains a reality in both the Greek Life system and the world as a whole.

Conclusion

Minority LGBTQ Greek students exhibit ideal characteristics-loyalty, determination, perseverance, integrity, and drive- desired in any Greek organization member except for their sexuality. These members uphold their organizations above their own basic needs showing a loyalty to their respective organization that surpasses the first commitment any individual has to themselves as a human being and as a student at their institution. Minority LGBTQ students show an incredible ability to adapt and survive in organizations and a wider community that is not openly appreciative of their presence. Although the freedom of being out and in their organization is not always an option, their perseverance through discriminatory circumstances exemplifies a drive to live the life they want for themselves at seemingly no matter what the cost and possibly implying the possession of “conflicting identifications.”

It is also these other “conflicting identifications” that I have been also working through in the process of conducting this research. That is being an LGBTQ Black woman lesbian Greek member – therefore part of the very community I wish to research, and being a student-researcher. I have used elements of autoethnography as a means of negotiating the tensions and limitations and maximizing the opportunities afforded me by these aspects of who I am. As previously stated in the section on Research Methodology I acknowledge the limitations and scope of this study. However, I feel that both my subject and my own position within it, justify this approach, because as it has been noted,

For the most part, those who advocate and insist on canonical forms of doing and writing research are advocating a White, masculine, heterosexual, middle/upper-classed, Christian, able-bodied perspective. Following these conventions, a researcher not only disregards other ways of knowing but also implies that other ways necessarily are unsatisfactory and invalid.

Autoethnography, on the other hand, expands and opens up a wider lens on the world, eschewing rigid definitions of what constitutes meaningful and useful research; this approach also helps us understand how the kinds of people we claim, or are perceived, to be influence interpretations of what we study, how we study it, and what we say about our topic (as Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2011)

In conclusion, this study indicates the importance of conducting a fuller investigation into the experiences of LGBTQ students of all ethnicities within the Greek system. My original research proposal offers a starting point for future work - perhaps by another LGBTQ Greek student.

Many people within the Greek system who are not LGBTQ seem content with the changes that have transpired so far in relation to LGBTQ members and issues. However, from my peers and my own recent and on-going experiences not enough change has happened. Yes, there is more conversation on these topics, and a gay keynote speaker are sometimes invited to events, but the overall culture of Sorority and Fraternity Life very little if anything has changed. My hope is that as those small changes increase, larger and more changes that are significant will begin to occur. One such change would be changing the heteronormative language used within sororities and fraternities. This would make a huge difference in the ability of LGBTQ members

to feel more comfortable and accepted. So for example, formal social events need to be promoted in wording that does not imply your date has to be of the opposite sex.. Another significant improvement would be to not allow derogatory homophobic comments at any kind of event within Greek Life. Another recommendation would be to recognize those members who are out in a positive manner- i. e. Living my Ritual Out Celebration-a day or event that would be used to celebrate, embrace, and endorse members within the Greek community currently out of the closet and living their Greek rituals. I hope that this type of organization would encourage more LGBTQ Greek members to come out. Other activities that would both promote the inclusion of LGBTQ students and register a strong opposition to homophobia, would be to have inter-council social events I just for LGBTQ members and their allies, such as Out and Greek BBQ or formal dinner.

My final recommendation would be for Greek organizations to play a role in providing more progressive education on LGBTQ community issues as well as more material on and for LGBTQ Greek students. There are more LGBTQ Greek members than we know of but because of the continuing homophobic culture within Greek Life they may never come out until after they graduate. In order to bring more cultural diversity and inclusion, it would be great to see mandated Open Doors Training for all Greek organizations on campus or Safe Zone Training in addition to the Diversity standard for Standards of Excellence here at Ohio State.

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